

The biggest lessons brands can learn from music artists

 By [Siphwe Mpeta](#)

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In a world where the topic of personal branding has been tackled numerously, we wonder what more can be said about it - which analogies can be used to help organisations understand the topic better or what examples can be used to help the public understand the topic better.



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Well, there's a quote by Berthold Auerbach that goes,

“ *Music is the only universal language that needs no translation.* ”

Brands can learn a lot from music artists with regards to how they manage their personal brands which can then be translated into two important areas:

- Authenticity
- Collaboration

Easier to sell something that is authentic

Nothing about Michael Jackson, Marvin Gaye, The Beatles, Fela Kuti or Kendrick Lamar scream manufactured or fake. They are authentically incredible, authentically cool and branding geniuses. Using one of the most authentic artists of our generation as a reference, Kendrick Lamar and his albums *To Pimp A Butterfly* and *DAMN* – both are perfect examples of authenticity.

They tell the story of how easy it is to sell something that is authentic instead of trying to fit an overcrowded box. One thing that has been the key selling factor for Lamar is his pride – knowing where he comes from and sharing the everyday stories of a young black boy from Compton through his lyrics.

The other thing that makes him easily marketable is his unique style of not trying to create the usual style of rap but always breaking from the norm – from his *TPAB* album (which was inspired by the Jazz genre) to *DAMN* (that references God as his core topic aimed at tackling the basic values of life).

All these elements have enabled him to resonate more with his captive audience to an extent that it created a platform for him to have “superfans”. That has enabled him to create and grow an organic following which has, in turn, also enabled him to share his message with the rest of the world.

The lesson for brands is to not force their messages onto their audiences – it’s better instead to be “You” and be your own message. This will, in turn, translate itself into who you are as a brand and what you truly stand for. Without the core principle, the mis-alignment will not translate well ‘Think Legacy and not Love’.

Collaboration is at the heart of innovation

Sharing your work with others is a beautiful thing but creating one with somebody with similar tastes is even better and this is what collaboration is all about. Collaboration is at the heart of innovation in the creative world and in business, it also has the ability to unify communities and break boundaries.

Think, Linkin Park and Jay Z with their track *Encore* – Daft Punk, Pharrell Williams and Nile Rodgers with *Get lucky* – Shakira and Wyclef Jean with *Hips don’t lie* – Katy Perry and Kanye West with *ET*, just to mention a few. Even though some of these songs were mostly based on feeding popular culture, they had achieved one thing and that was breaking from the norm with the aim of topping the charts.

Making music alone is fun, one can even go as far as likening that to establishing a brand alone also being fun. You are essentially in charge of everything. However, collaborations are extremely beneficial in several ways. There’s more value in them than most people think. Life and Productions shares [5 reasons](#) why musicians should collaborate in music and those reasons are, **collaborations build relationships, it enables one to learn new things, it aids in creating something unexpected/different, speeds up the process and it helps with combining audiences.**

In addition to the above, Sir Richard Branson supports these notions by stating that:

“ Collaboration is the fundamental driver of our success at Virgin, it always has and always will be. In order for people to work together, to be successful in business, and in life, you need to connect and collaborate. ”

Collaboration is all about tit for tat

Most brands make the mistake of thinking that one must collaborate with whoever is popular, truth be told, collaboration is all about tit for tat, but it still needs to make business sense and it still needs to relate to the true values of the brand. Successful brand collaboration depends on both brands being able to benefit from the existing market of the other, or from gaps in the market that can be filled. There’s something about a collaborative relationship between brands that competitors will find hard to replicate, think Nike and Apple.

With all that said though, there are times when collaborations don't work well with some of the worst collaborations happening in music. A few good examples include LL Cool J and Brad Paisley getting together for an uncomfortable duet in their *Accidental Racist* track or when Eddie Murphy and Michael Jackson collaborated on a track called *Whatzupwitu* in 1993.

Great musicians don't jump onto any collaboration that presents itself, they instead think about a common goal/vision, mutual respect towards their craft, identification of both their strengths and weaknesses and the effort (commitment) to make it work.

For any brand to excel in this era they need to take into consideration the above elements.

ABOUT SIPHIWE MPETA

Siphiwe is an analytical yet out of the box thinker and a music selector in his own right. Having studied at Vega and worked at various industries one of his key topics of interest lies in brand storytelling, strategic brand communications, urban-lifestyle, music, digital communications and corporate social responsibility/sustainability. Siphiwe is on a mission to help organisations to think in a more holistic and design thinking fashion.

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